

# Historic District Commission

## Minutes Meeting No. 10-2009

Thursday, November 19, 2009

**HDC present:** Max van Balgooy (Chair), Craig Moloney, Janet Hunt McCool, Anita Neal Powell  
**Staff present:** Robin Ziek, Preservation Planner; Jim Wasilak, Chief of Planning

### IV. EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### A. HDC2010-00481

Applicant: John B. Stevens  
Address: 602 Great Falls Road  
Request: Demolish house at 602 Great Falls Road [Bessie Hill House]

Staff presented a summary of the staff research with a PowerPoint presentation. The property is significant as it illustrates an early African American kinship community in West End. The community began in 1845, with the purchase of an acre of land by a free black woman named Ann Willson. Through six generations of her family, the property was passed down, with portions of the original acre deeded to children, resulting in the unusual lot sizes such as is illustrated with the subject property.

Staff noted that the Great Falls Road settlement is identified as a resource within the adopted *Historic Resources Management Plan* under Historic Context 5: Development as Montgomery County Seat: 1825-1873. In 1987, the subject property was included in the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) inventory as the Bessie Hill House (M:26/24/2). The Bessie Hill House and the neighboring house at 600 Falls Road, known as the Johnson-Clarke House (M:26/24/1), are both included in the 1989 *Rockville Historic Building Catalog* as site #s 104 and 103.

Mr. Stevens, the property owner, summarized his interest in selling the property. Ms. Sharyn Duffin, local resident and Bessie Hill's great-granddaughter, spoke in favor of historic designation on the basis of the significance of the free black kinship community. Peerless Rockville submitted a letter in support of designation.

The HDC acknowledged the property's cultural and historical significance, and discussion then focused on "historic integrity." This is the ability of a property to convey its sense of time and place. In 1986, when original historic research was undertaken, replacement windows had already been installed. Between 1986 and 1989, when the property was included in the Historic Building Catalog (#104), vinyl siding was added over the existing wood siding. While the front porch has been enclosed, the original massing has been preserved.

The HDC unanimously agreed that the property was remarkable for the historic continuity of six generations of one African American family in this location, and that this house, the oldest one in the overall kinship community, continued to convey the historic sense of time and place, including its massing and design, materials (with wood siding beneath the vinyl), its alley location, the small scale lot and the associated small scale house, and its location in the remnants of the original African American kinship community.

The HDC agreed that the property is significant under Criterion I-C (Pattern of Events) because it illustrates the development pattern of an African American kinship community; and for Criterion I-D (Cultural Value) because it is a rare example of the small scale vernacular housing associated with African Americans in Rockville; and for Criterion II-A (Architecture) because it is an intact example of vernacular housing characteristic of working-class residents in Rockville at the turn of the 20th century.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Moloney made a motion to recommend historic designation for this property on the basis of Criteria I-C, I-D, and II-A. This was seconded by Commissioner Powell.

**VOTE:** 4-0 approved